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THE LATE LAMENTED:

A Comedy

IN

THREE ACTS

BY

W. W. HOWE.

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CLARK & HOFELINE, BOOK PRINTERS, 112 GRAVIER STREET.

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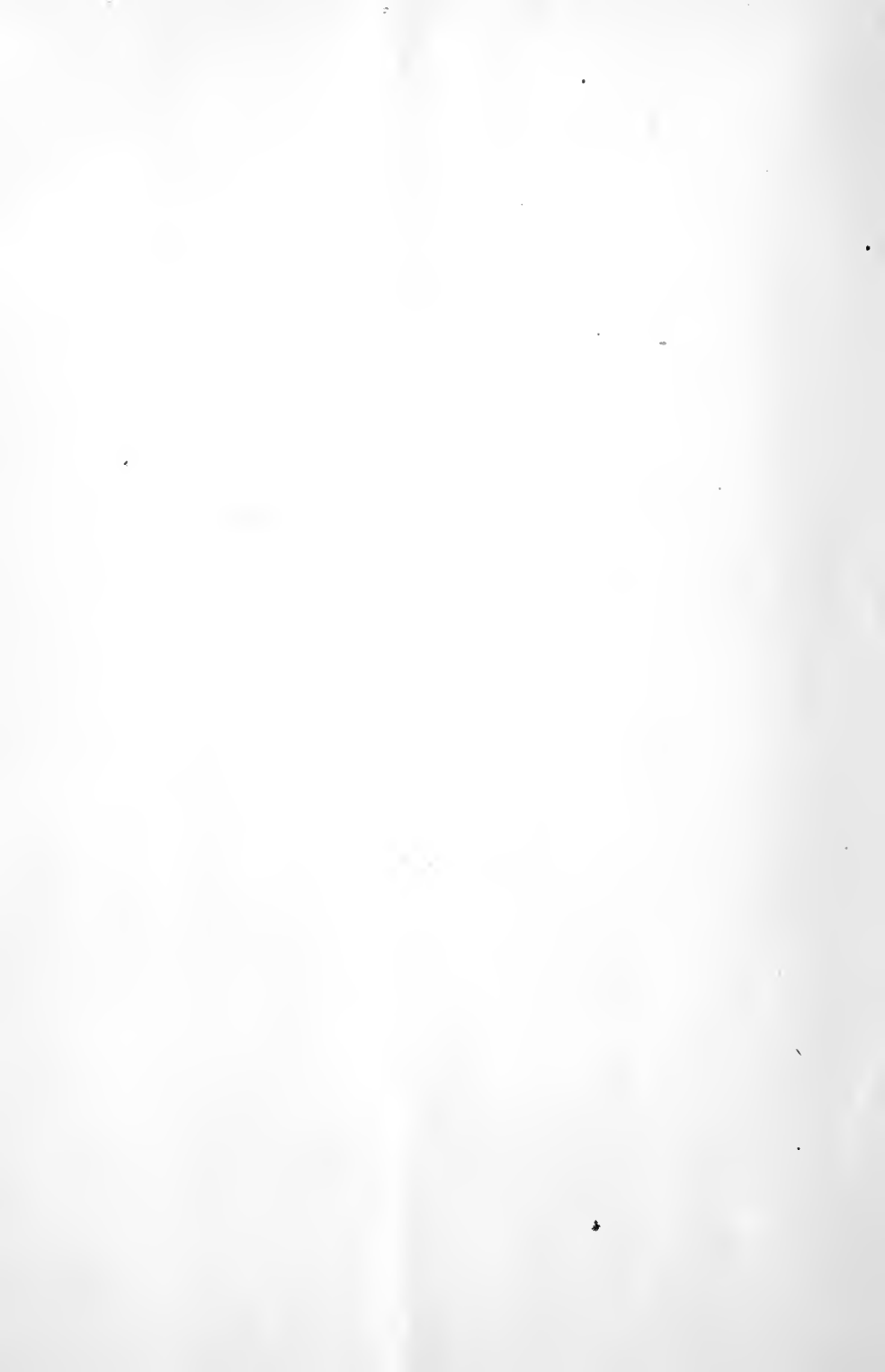
ENTERED ACCORDING TO THE ACT OF CONGRESS IN THE YEAR 1878, BY
WILLIAM W. HOWE,
IN THE OFFICE OF THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS AT WASHINGTON.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

COLONEL BILLINGTON,
MRS. DORA BILLINGTON,
JOHN POOLE,
JAMES BARBER,
MARY SULLIVAN.

SCENE.—A Country Seat on the Hudson. May, 1865.

NOTE.—The student of French literature will observe that the principal incident of this little sketch is suggested by Octave Feuillet's *L'Urne*.



THE LATE LAMENTED.

ACT FIRST.

SCENE I.—*The villa on the left. MARY is seated on a garden chair arranging flowers in a vase.*

Enter JOHN POOLE, the gardener, bringing more flowers.

JOHN. Good morning, Mary; here are some more flowers for the breakfast table; and here is one for you.

MARY. Thank you, sir; and what am I to do with it?

JOHN. Why, wear it in your pretty hair, of course—It's a sprig of crape myrtle, the first of the season. Don't you remember that the Colonel brought the plant from Natchez?

MARY. I'd rather you'd given me a piece of crape.

JOHN. And why?

MARY. And why? And why? Are your wits as dull as your hoe? Haven't you any feelings? Why don't you be like one of your own cabbages, and have a heart? You know very well, why. Haven't you been gardener on this place for six months? Didn't you come here with Col. Billington when he married his wife, the young and lovely widow of Major Bagatelle? And wasn't Major Bagatelle killed at the battle of Pea Ridge, in Arkansas, and wasn't his orderly killed too?

JOHN. Well?

MARY. Well indeed—well for you perhaps—or you'd never have been here at this pretty place. And who was that orderly, that brave, noble, high private? James Barber, who was gardener on the next place in Major Bagatelle's time, and went to the war and got into the fight at Pea Ridge.

JOHN, (*aside*.) Just the place for a gardener to come up to the scratch.

MARY. And got killed; and after what passed between him and me when he went away, do you expect me to wear pink flowers for you? Oh, he was a man!

JOHN. Well he may have been a man. By his name I'd guess so; but, judging by his work, he wasn't much of a gardener.

MARY. And who said he was? I said he was a man!

JOHN. And from all accounts he was a pretty good drinkist, and had no more fancy for watering his liquor than he had for watering his plants. The finest flowers he ever raised, they say, were those that bloomed on his face. [*Exit*.]

MARY. Oh, dear me, what fools men are! Here is John Poole, good-looking, good-natured, has a nice place, wants to get married, wants to marry me, and the only way he can find to court me is to abuse poor James Barber! Perhaps it's just as well that men don't know us as we know ourselves. If they did, oh my!

Enter COL. BILLINGTON.

Good morning, sir.

BILLINGTON. Good morning, Mary. (*Apart*.) Well I've had a splendid ride this morning. The chesnut mare is fine—and she ought to be, daughter of Lexington. And she is rather amiable for one of her sex. (*Looks at his watch*.) Nine o'clock. (*To Mary*.) Has Mrs. Billington rung for you yet?

MARY. Oh, no, sir, madam isn't up yet. I s'pose she was tired with working in the park yesterday.

BILLINGTON. Working in the park?

MARY. Well, yes, the artist came to set up the little monument; and, as poor James Barber used to say, she was "bossing the job."

BILLINGTON. Monument? What monument?

MARY. Perhaps, sir, you'd like to see it. It's beautiful.

BILLINGTON. But what is it, and why is it?

MARY. Why, Madam has been setting up a funereal urn, I think she calls it to the memory of the Late Lamented, as she calls him.

BILLINGTON. The who?

MARY. The Late Lamented, Major Bagatelle, to be sure, and what with worrying over the urn, and weeping over the dead, it's no wonder she sleeps late.

BILLINGTON. Perhaps I'd better look at this—urn. (*Turns away but comes back.*)

MARY. You don't look well, sir. Beg your pardon, sir—are you ailing?

BILLINGTON. Oh no, of course not—I am as gay as a Wall street bear in a panic. Who wouldn't be gay? Ha, ha, just so! I'm as gay as an American Comedy,—or as a fashionable undertaker at a first-class funeral. Why not? I am young, and healthy I have a beautiful wife, and this villa on the Hudson, which is not only very pretty but is to be further embellished with a monument to the memory of the Late Lamented, my predecessor. See here, Mary, you have been Madam's maid for five years, you have noticed things here for six months past, you knew Major Bagatelle of course—well—what sort of a creature was he? Was he an archangel? Was he a first-class seraph? Was he every way so much better than I can ever hope to be?

MARY. Why, sir, to tell the truth, it isn't for me to make comparisons. He was very much thought of. You might know that if you'd take the trouble to look at the monument, and the lines that Madam has had cut on it.

BILLINGTON, (*apart.*) It passes comprehension—meeting my lovely wife accidentally, marrying her hastily under peculiar circumstances in the midst of the last campaign of the war, the courtship carried on by my sister, her schoolmate, rather than by my busy self; separated from my bride at the altar, for weeks I have lavished on Dora every delicate attention, every minute tenderness that I

dared to offer and all in vain. She could not be colder if she had been made by one of these modern Ice Machines. Having no time to woo her before marriage, I began to woo her as soon as I had placed the wedding ring upon her finger. In vain—in vain! I might as well woo the Cardiff Giant. I beg pardon—the Greek Slave. (*Turning to Mary*) Of course my girl—you don't expect me to go into details in such a matter—but—at least let me hope that you are not fashioned of the same flint as your mistress,—here is poor John Poole the gardener, think to what a state you have reduced him with your ways and your manners. When I first saw him this morning he told me of his real affection for you, and of your disdain for him, and as he spoke he actually wept like a—a——

MARY. A sprinkling pot, I s'pose.

BILLINGTON. I give you my word—if he goes on in this way the only use we can make of him will be to plant him out as a weeping willow. Come, Mary, he has asked me to intercede—can't you love him a little?—(*In his earnestness, Billington lays one hand on her shoulder and with the other chucks her under the chin.*)

He is a fine honest fellow, a good gardener, even a fair botanist, he gets large wages and lays them up. Marry him; help him; some day he will rise in the world as Americans are apt to do. Come Mary, can't you fancy him a little?

MARY, (*drawing off*.) Ah, sir, even a little would be too much for a heart in which reigns the memory of the late lamented James Barber.

BILLINGTON. What? You have a Late Lamented, too? Barber—Barber—the name is familiar. He was gardener about here before the war, and went off as orderly to Major Bagatelle.

MARY. The same, sir. The Major, they tell me, was a Division Quartermaster. Here is a piece from the village paper that I shall always keep. It tells about the tragedy. (*She reads from a scrap of newspaper.*)

“Major Bagatelle was gallantly endeavoring to place his wagon train and surplus mules in a place of safety at the right and rear of

his division, when a stray shell exploded near him, and a fragment struck him in the small of the back. The wound was not at first thought dangerous, but the genial habits of the Major were adverse to the progress of cure."

BILLINGTON. Genial habits, just so.

MARY. "He died on the third day, and in the rapid movement of our troops towards Helena, was buried so hastily that his grave will not probably be ever identified. His orderly, James Barber, in the confusion produced among the animals by the explosion of the fiery missile, was kicked in the head by a fractious mule. His skull was instantly shattered, and he died that night. His hasty grave will also remain unknown till the last trump be sounded. Private Barber was well known in our village. He had his faults, who has not? He was, perhaps, a little too fond of draw-poker and commissary whisky, and had the disdain of an enthusiast for steady work; but he had a good heart, and will be lamented by his old friends, who will be the last to draw his frailties from their dread abode."

Ah, sir, isn't that beautifully written? And wasn't James a hero? Why, you might have known he was to hear him talk before he went away. And couldn't he talk? Oh, sir, we shall never see his like again.

BILLINGTON, (*aside*). I should hope not. Well, Mary, it seems that John Poole and myself are in the same boat. What would you think of our hanging ourselves side by side in the conservatory? Do you think that we would stand a chance, then, to become Late Lamented in our turn? There, don't cry, Mary, for if you do I shall be inclined to laugh, and that would be very improper under the circumstances. (*He turns to walk away.*)

MARY, (*dryly*). Will you not look at the monument, sir?

BILLINGTON. Bye and bye. I may see it in walking up and down the lawn.

[*Exit MARY by the right. BILLINGTON by the left.*]

SCENE II.—*Another part of the lawn.*—BILLINGTON *solus*.

BILLINGTON. It is a lovely morning; the air is balmy as a dream

of love ; the birds are wooing each other with flash of feather and burst of song ; the flowers welcome the bees to their sweet embrace. On such a morning even the coldest heart might be a little warmed. I'll go to Dora and make one more effort to win her obdurate——

Enter JAMES BARBER at left, shabby, red nosed, dressed like a tramp.

Well, sir, and what will you have,——?

BARBER. Why, if you really wish to know, I should say a whisky cocktail would about fill the bill after a dusky walk on a pretty hot morning.

BILLINGTON. Who are you ?

BARBER. My name is James Barber, I used to——

Enter MARY.

MARY. James Barber ! Oh-o-o-o. [*Faints, enter John Poole, who catches her.*]

POOLE. James Barber !

BARBER. Yes,—James Barber—is there anything wonderful about the name of James Barber ? Why, you look as much astonished as if I had told you my name was Horace Greeley !

TABLEAU.

ACT SECOND.

SCENE I.—*Another part of the lawn.*

BILLINGTON, (*solus.*) Fortunately John Poole and the cook will keep Mary under a proper process of restoration until I can see this fellow Barber and find out what his resurrection from the dead means. Let me think. [*Walks up and down a moment, when enters John Poole with a letter.*]

JOHN. The letter was marked *immediate*, and the Postmaster sent it up by the baker.

BILLINGTON. Thank you, and give this to the baker. (*Handing him some postal currency. Exit John.*) And what is this very important letter? Office Metropolitan Police, New York. Barber, bummer? Oh, ho! Well, really, Barber, that's very good, (*glancing thro' the letter and putting it in his pocket*) I had a dim idea, and I am exceedingly obliged to you for coming just in time; and now, as the cheerful Hamlet says, "to my lady's chamber."

SCENE II.—*Mrs. Billington's Boudoir.*

MRS. BILLINGTON. And so the days go on—go on. Ah, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, what a poet you were, and how you describe the miseries of a woman's heart.

Enter BILLINGTON.

BILLINGTON. Why, Dora, dear, you look charmingly this morning.

MRS. BILLINGTON. Thanks; I am sorry I cannot return the compliment, but I must say I can praise neither your style nor your appearance. You burst into my private apartment like a savage, with whip and riding boots. May I ask if this is a stable? Believe me, Colonel, there may be reserve and decency even between people who are chained together by the fetters of marriage.

BILLINGTON. Upon my word, Dora, you are a little too severe in your method. I thought to make myself agreeable by paying this very early visit on this very lovely morning.

MRS. BILLINGTON. And you thought to make yourself agreeable, I presume, by embracing my maid under the window this very lovely morning.

BILLINGTON. Oh, come now, Dora, what do you mean?

MRS. BILLINGTON. I mean that, looking in my glass a moment, I saw reflected the scene between Mary and yourself.

BILLINGTON. But, my dear child, you do me wrong. I was urging Mary to listen to poor John Poole, and if, in my earnestness,

I chucked her under the chin—why, I was merely acting as John's attorney in fact.

MRS. BILLINGTON. Oh, certainly; and I dare say you would like to practice the profession of attorney regularly in that style.

BILLINGTON. Now, darling, don't be jealous. You have too much soul and too much sense for that. I did not come here this morning to quarrel. I came to tell you—how much I love you.

MRS. BILLINGTON. Dear me. I was hoping you might have come to tell me something at once new and agreeable.

BILLINGTON. I came to tell you how sorry I was you could not have been with me in my ride this morning. The river was glorious. The land was no less beautiful. Everything was sweetness and light. I met such a happy little party of young people going to some pic-nic—rustics, of course—not quite so elegant as you are, Dora; but they were happy. Each couple seemed fortunately mated—neatly dressed—faces radiant—baskets of lunch well filled, and I—I was alone.

MRS. BILLINGTON. And you had not even a basket of lunch?

BILLINGTON. I was truly sad, my loneliness was sincere. Alas, I said to myself, I have everything needful for happiness, but one, the love of my wife. Ah, Dora, I thought of you, of your beauty, of your talents, of your gifts and graces, various and subtle as the perfumes of spring, and I could not believe that you would always be so strange—so cold. The thought came to me that to-day if I were near you there might be in my voice some accent, in my eyes some light,—perhaps even a tear,—that might touch you. Was I wrong? Tell me, Dora, what can I do to make you love me? (*Catches her hand.*)

DORA, (*a little moved and then straightening up.*) You might, as my attorney, interview Mary, and—ask her to—ask the cook—whether we are to have any breakfast to-day. (*Exit Billington in a rage. Dora bursts into tears, and walks up and down wringing her hands.*) Ah, the puzzle of life! The puzzle of life! I heard a sermon at Newport, once, on the text, "what I would not, that

I do." Saint Paul must have been in a feminine frame of mind when he said that. (*Goes to the window.*) What? There is my husband—poor Theodore—he seems to be excited—he stops—he moves on—he is going towards the MONUMENT,—he seizes the urn in his arms,—he is coming this way.—Oh, dear—— (*She walks up and down.* Enter Billington with the Urn. They look at each other with dignity.)

BILLINGTON. Madam, what is this Urn?

DORA. This——Urn?

BILLINGTON. Yes——this Urn!

DORA, (*looking at it with curiosity.*) I should think it might be marble.

BILLINGTON. No jesting, please; I ask it seriously—what is this Urn and what is this inscription on the base, surmounted by the letter B.

DORA. An inscription!

BILLINGTON. Yes, an inscription. (*Reads.*)

" TO THE MEMORY
OF
A HERO
WHO HAD BUT ONE FAULT
AND THAT WAS THAT
HE WAS
MORTAL."

What do you think of that?

DORA. It seems to me rather a pretty idea.

BILLINGTON, (*with impatience.*) Good Heavens, Dora, do you think my good nature is inexhaustible? Do you wish to sting me into craziness with your caprices? Why, see—we have been married half a year, and if we were strangers at a way-side inn we could not be more thoroughly separated. And more than that, I am worse off than a stranger, for a stranger would be neither pained by

your indifference nor tantalized by your whims. Shall we never—— never——

DORA. If I interrupt you, Colonel, it is to save you from being ungenerous, and that I am sure you would not wish to be. When you did me the honor to ask for my hand, your sister acting—to use your happy phrase—as your attorney, did I make any mystery of my heart? The loss of the distinguished soldier who had been my husband, the painful circumstances of his death, had left a cloud on my memory which refused to fade away. I did not conceal the fact. I claimed from your sister, acting as intermediary, a proper respect for the scruples of a grief so legitimate. It was promised.

BILLINGTON. Very like—very like—I know my good sister and I can fancy the fervor of her vows. And suppose I authorized her to make these promises, what is a “proper respect?” Is it to alienate us forever? Four years have elapsed since the loss was suffered. Was I wrong to hope that before this time—but, no; your grief grows more eccentric, you nurse it as you would a strange plant; you keep anniversaries; you compose epitaphs; you turn the lawn into a cemetery. This is not mourning, it is mockery. Do you remember the story of Mausoleus, King of Crete? You may read it in the New American Cyclopædia. When he died, and his remains had been properly cremated, his surviving spouse swallowed the ashes, well flavored with wine, and so made an end of the matter; and, so far as I can discover, never alluded to the subject again. The story is said to be a true one, though there may have been some ‘lye’ about the ashes.

DORA. Indeed, your sudden levity, sir, is rather brutal. And you would do well to read up in Ancient History a little. The unfortunate queen died of grief after a year of mourning.

BILLINGTON. So much the better. Why not imitate her example and die of grief, and so turn me into perfect ridicule?

DORA. Ah! ridicule! that’s the trouble, is it? One’s masculine vanity may suffer——

BILLINGTON. And why not? A man may be wounded in many ways. One bullet may hit his heart, another, his great toe. Neither is pleasant. Do you wish to make me absurd? If I am made ridiculous, can my wife escape a similar fate? Do you suppose the equivocal relation in which we live escapes the notice of those useful persons we hire as domestic servants? Do you suppose they don't tell the butcher and the baker and the candlestick maker? By Jove, madam, I wish you would give me a rival of flesh and blood. But the one you favor me with has an advantage——

DORA. How?

BILLINGTON. He is dead—and therefore I cannot kill him!

DORA. Enough. When a woman finds herself the object of a fury which vibrates between the coarsest anger and the coldest cynicism, the only part left for her to play is silence. Pray, sir, if you prate of murder, kill me!

BILLINGTON. Thank you, I am not an Othello, either by "race, color or previous condition." I have never been much of a lady-killer, as you know. But one thing is certain. I have no fancy for this style of matrimony. It's like trying to sail upon

—— "a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."

Nay, more, if our wedded life is to be in the future what it has been in the past, it would, perhaps, be well to terminate it, not by any "killing," but by a "peaceable secession."

DORA. I thank you.

BILLINGTON. No thanks are needed. Your mother is still living. Her home offers you a respectable retreat. The moment you signify the wish,——

DORA. I signify it now!

BILLINGTON. So be it. The train will leave at 11:45; and—— perhaps——you'll be kind enough to take that URN with you.

DORA, (*seizing the urn.*) Ah! sweet souvenir of my only love! Precious symbol—— (*Enter Mary in terrible excitement.*)

MARY. Oh, Madam, Madam !

DORA. Well, what in the world is the matter ?

MARY. Oh, Madam, Madam !

DORA. Why, child, can't you speak ?

BILLINGTON. Or you might call up the coachman and let him swear a little. He can do justice to any subject.

MARY. Oh, Madam, James Barber has returned !

DORA. James Barber, the Major's orderly ! Why, he is dead.

MARY. No, no, he survived—he returned to tell the tale. At least, he says so, and, though he's the biggest liar I ever knew, I am sure he tells the truth this time !

DORA. It's incredible. You say he's there ?

BILLINGTON, (*dryly.*) Some impostor, probably.

MARY. Impostor ! Perhaps I don't know James Barber ! Why, I know every blossom on his nose. He is following me up stairs. He wishes to see you, Madam

DORA. Let him come in. (*Enter Barber. Col. B. seats himself apart.*) Is it possible,—poor James,—is it you ?

JAMES. Jes' so, ma'am. It's I, me, and myself, thank the Lord !

DORA. He is weary, faint ; give him a chair, Mary.

JAMES. I thank you kindly, Mrs. Bagatelle.

DORA, (*aside to Mary.*) Mrs. Bagatelle ! He does not know—hush Mary. And whence have you come, James ?

JAMES. From Arizona—from among the Apache Indians.

DORA. Indeed ! And how have you made this immense journey ?

JAMES. On foot, mem.

BILLINGTON, (*aside.*) “ Oh, Walker ! ”

DORA. Ah! How you must have suffered?

JAMES. I should rather think I had, especially from thirst.

DORA. Surely, surely. Mary bring that decanter of Tokay and a box of Albert biscuit. (*Barber begins to fill himself with wine and biscuits.*) Ah, you feel better now?

JAMES. A little better, a little better.

DORA. He almost smiles, Mary.

BILLINGTON. It isn't the first time.

DORA. Do not hesitate, James. (*He makes another sharp attack on the lunch.*) I do not mean to eat only, and to drink, but to tell me the sad, sad story of your adventures and your escape.

JAMES. Well, if you order me to.

BILLINGTON. If you order me! Come, Barber, go on with your story, and go straight, if possible.

JAMES, (*to Mary.*) Who is this party who speaks so peart?

MARY, (*to James.*) Oh, nobody. A neighbor.

JAMES, (*to himself.*) He's a neighbor I don't like. (*Aloud.*) Well, to perseed. At the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansaw, as you may remember, the Major and I fought like heroes in defense of the wagon train, and we saved it. Not a mule was lost, not a bale of hay. I am told that General Curtis would have had my name mentioned in general orders for this, except that he didn't know my name, and, as you will see, never had a chance to find it out.

DORA. Ah, hero!

JAMES. While executing prodigies of valor, I was struck down by a fragment of a shell.

BILLINGTON. Are you sure?

JAMES. Well, it may have been a mule's hoof. There's precious little difference, you bet. And I was left for dead. The train moved on, and, as the newspapers say, the tide of battle rolled to another part of the tented field. (*Takes more wine.*)

BILLINGTON, (*aside.*) Tented field is good. The excitement of such a battle would be in-tents, I suppose.

JAMES. I was left alone, and in five minutes was captured by a company of Pike's Confederate Indians, and taken to the enemies' rear. Next day the noble red men deserted Mr. Pike, and went off to the Choctaw Nation, and took me along. They found they hadn't much use for me, and I escaped pretty easy towards the Plains, and thought to get into New Mexico or North Texas, and go across the Rio Grande, you know. (*Takes another drink, and fills his mouth with biscuit.*)

BILLINGTON, (*aside.*) Well, yes; we think we know.

DORA. What patriotism!

MARY, (*aside.*) Now I know what patriotism is! He just hungers and thirsts after it.

JAMES. Well—I was took again, by a wandering band of Indians, from the Plains. I tell you that was a fight. The arrows just flew around me like hail. (*Takes some more wine.*)

BILLINGTON. In point of fact the hero had an arrow escape!

JAMES. And these cussed Injuns kep' me with them till about two months ago, when they let me off, as I'll show you in a minute. I got to Santa Fe, and so along home.

DORA. And the—the—Major—

JAMES. Ah, you should have seen him, how he fit in that battle. (*Hesitates, and takes another drink.*)

DORA. Proceed—proceed, James, I must know every terrible detail, even to the mortal blow—

JAMES. The mortal blow? Why, the Major wasn't killed.

DORA. What?

MARY. Wh-at?

BILLINGTON. Good Heavens!

DORA falls in MARY'S arms.

TABLEAU.

ACT THIRD.

SCENE I.—*The Lawn. Billington solus.*

BILLINGTON. This is an eventful morning indeed. It is n't too late for a late breakfast yet—and we have had excitements enough to last an ordinary household for a year.

Enter MARY.

Well, Mary, has Mrs. Billington so far recovered as to be able to hear the rest of your gallant Barber's story?

MARY. She has just sent me, sir, to ask you to bring him into the library.

BILLINGTON. Very good, and suppose you bring John Poole, who, I dare say, will not object to come.

MARY. Yes, sir. *[Exeunt, in opposite directions.]*

SCENE II.—*The Library. (Mrs. B., MARY and JOHN enter and take proper places. Then enter Col. B., and J. BARBER.)*

DORA, (*feebly.*) I beg you, James Barber, to proceed with your extraordinary story.

JAMES. It is true, mem, as was reported by the papers, that the Major was hit by a fragment of a shell. It seemed to be a kind of stray shot from a piece that was elevated too much, and it come way over where our train was. The Major was knocked over, and I s'posed he was killed, and so did the rest, maybe. But when I was took by the Indians on the Plains, who should I find there, a captive also, but the Major. He had been taken about the time he come to on the battle field, by the Confeds, and carried off to Tyler, Texas, where they had a military prison in the pine woods. From there he tried to escape up towards the northwest, and got picked up by the same tribe as I was.

DORA. And then,—

JAMES. Well, all is—he's there. They have got him, and they make a kind of servant of him.

DORA. Gracious Heaven!

JAMES. They haven't heard of the Fifteenth Amendment down there. But there's a way to get him home.

DORA. How——oh how——?

JAMES. Well, it's no use to send troops or anything of that kind—You might as well send them to chase the shad in the North River. But, you see, I know those red skins, they let me go expressly at the Major's request, to see if I couldn't get somebody to ransom him. And they said that they'd let the Major go if his people would send me with so much powder, and so many blankets, and so much whisky, and so much money; and the money must be gold, so they can trade with the Mexicans, who don't think so very much of rag currency.

DORA. And how much will this ransom be?

JAMES. Well, the very least I can do it for is ten thousand dollars, gold—and that will cost at present rates about fifteen thousand dollars currency.

DORA. Fifteen thousand dollars,—alas, I have almost no money of my own. Major Bagatelle spent my fortune, soon after my marriage——

BILLINGTON, (*aside.*) That's the reason the newspaper called him “a man of genial habits.”

DORA. My poor mother also has only an annuity and no capital. No, my good James, we must send this word to the Major. I will live with the most painful economy; my mother I hope will join me in doing the same. I will save as much as I can, and so will she. I will teach, I will sew. I will go as companion to some old lady; or, better yet, I will get employment as laundress;—I will live on bread and water—and in a few years—if I live—I may lay up enough——

BILLINGTON, (*coming forward.*) No——madam——no——a woman who has been though but nominally my wife, shall never be exposed to privations which I can prevent. I will lend the fifteen thousand dollars,——not to you, for you would be too proud to accept the loan,——but to Major Bagatelle, whose unfortunate condition permits me to take this liberty.

BARBER. Well, now, Colonel, you're a brick. I call that doing things brown on both sides!

DORA. Ah, Colonel, how can I thank you for such magnanimity——such——such——Mary, take James Barber down to his breakfast. You may then return.

BARBER. Colonel, you're a trump, A1, clipper-built and copper fastened.

BILLINGTON. And you——mix your metaphors a little.

BARBER. But not my liquor——I'm going to drink your health, Colonel, in some more of the same. [*Exeunt Mary and Barber.*]

DORA. This noble conduct touches me very closely. I am only afraid that your generosity may put you to inconvenience——

BILLINGTON. Not at all. The future to which I shall devote myself, will easily permit such a modest sacrifice.

DORA. What future?

BILLINGTON. Ah, madam,——when General Lafayette paid his visit to this country, in 1824, and was introduced in the American manner to about a million people, he would say to each man that was presented——“My dear sir, are you married?” If the reply was yes, the Marquis would smile, and say, “Happy man.” If the reply was no, he smiled, and said, “Lucky Dog!” My future is that of a Lucky Dog. Your husband, being still alive, your marriage with me is a mere nullity. My future is that of a single man. I frankly confess that I do not care to remain in this country. Our relations to each other have been too strange and too sad. I could never meet you without sorrow,——nor would scan-

dal forget to attack us. Fortunately, the war in Mexico offers me a career where my military experience may be of some use to the cause of Republican liberty. (*Enter Mary.*) Allow me to step into the library a moment to write a check for the sum of money of which we were speaking.

DORA. If—you—please. (*Exit Col. B.*) Well Mary—

MARY. Well, Madam.

DORA. You see? I am overcome with joy. (*Bursts into tears.*)

MARY. And so am I. (*Bursts into tears.*)

DORA. I weep, child, because,—because—in the dialect of woman, all feelings are expressed by tears.

MARY. And I am weeping, madam; but I'm bound to say it isn't for joy.

DORA. What? When a kind Providence has sent back James Barber?

MARY. Providence is a little too kind, this time. Ah, madam, how that fellow was improved by being dead! I dressed his image up with all kinds of virtues just to tease John Poole,—

DORA. Indeed? Then you have been coquetting.

MARY. I'm afraid so. The worst of it was that I talked about Barber until I really began to believe my own stories. And when he came back so suddenly this morning, I was almost glad to see him. I thought, may be, the war might have done him good. He's worse than ever. Did you notice him when he came in? He was half tipsy then, and what with the wine you gave him he is rolling about like a Haverstraw sloop in a squall; and is telling John Poole such lies about the battle of Pea Ridge as make the chills run down my back. Ah, madam, if Major Bagatelle has gone on like his orderly, we both have a heavenly time before us.

DORA. I do not think the Major ever showed any such evil tendencies as James Barber—

MARY. Oh no——of course not,——only he was very attentive to every woman except his lawful wife.

DORA. Ah?

MARY. And he was a desperate gambler.

DORA. Indeed!

MARY. And he was much too fond of wine.

DORA. Is it so? I had forgotten.

MARY. And he treated you most cruelly.

DORA. Why, I do remember that he was a little obstinate.

MARY. As obstinate as a pig.

DORA. He *was*,——perhaps——in appearance,——a little hard towards me——sometimes.

MARY. As hard as a flint.

DORA, (*excitedly*.) Very good, very good, missy,——and suppose he was, what of it. Suppose you prove to me, alas too clearly, that the Major was a wretch and a fraud. Suppose you go further and prove, what you evidently desire to do, that Colonel Billington has more merit in his little finger than Major Bagatelle ever had from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot,——what good can result? Can that unravel this terrible complication? Can that deliver me from this fearful snare? You will drive me crazy. Go away, please; leave me alone. (*She perceives Col. B., who enters quietly.*) Ah sir, you were there? You heard me?

BILLINGTON. No, not precisely. I was coming in as you raised your voice, and caught a few words which you doubtless uttered in a moment of excitement, and will retract when you become a little calm.

DORA, (*approaching him in a humble manner*). No, I will retract nothing. Let the truth be told. I make my humble confession. You have hardly known me. Let me tell you about myself. I have been a spoiled child from my cradle. I was spoiled in the

nursery. I was spoiled at Madame Millefleur's school, where all the humanities were advertised, but where I was nurtured chiefly on confectionery and novels. I was spoiled in society, where I was allowed to run wild at seventeen. My imagination,—perhaps you would say my caprice,—was developed at the expense of every other faculty of body and mind. I married Major Bagatelle. He was very handsome. I thought his soul must be as beautiful as his face. I thought I loved him. I opened my heart to him as frankly as a flower opens to the sun. I gave myself to him without reserve, staking my whole life on that single card. I lost. I was deceived. He was faithless, and shallow. That he squandered my fortune was nothing, but that he scorned my love, so lavished on him, was terrible. I resolved that I would never be so rash again. When I married you I tried the opposite course. I held myself aloof. I made myself like marble. You were astonished and puzzled. Ah, if you could have known how hard was the part I was playing. Believe me, many times,——this morning,——when you came in, and spoke so kindly, I felt a wild desire to fling my arms around your neck, and confess that I was only playing a part. But still I feared for the result, having been once deluded. Beside, we all have a little foolish pride, and do not like to change a course and so confess an error. And you were a little to blame. You were——shall I say it?——too amiable, too reserved, too easily discouraged and rebuffed. A woman loves to feel the strong hand of power laid on her. She loves to kiss the rod. Why were you not a little more of a Turk?——What shall I say more? I am in a sad plight. Is that a reason why you should at once abandon me without a word of regret for yourself or compassion for me? Is there no hope for me? You speak of going to Mexico——take me with you! I will follow you to the end of the world. We were married in good faith. We love each other dearly, and who shall put us asunder?

COL. BILLINGTON. (*Looks at her a moment, then gravely takes the URN from the table and approaches the window.*) Heads! (*throws the Urn out.*) Madam, if I had the right I would certainly take you to Mexico, or better yet, I would remain here with you on the Hudson. Nothing could be more charming,

but the law has an obstinate spite against bigamists, and it really seems that unless some special stroke of fortune comes to our help——
(*enter John Poole*)——Well, what is it?

JOHN POOLE. You dropped this letter, sir, and as it was marked “Official,” I brought it in.

BILLINGTON. Thank you. It comes just in time. Let me read it again, and this time aloud. (*Reads.*)

OFFICE BOARD OF METROPOLITAN POLICE,
NEW YORK, May 25, 1865.

Dear Sir—A man named James Barber, a deserter and bounty-jumper is on his way to your place and may attempt to obtain money from you by false pretenses. His plan as revealed to a fellow-lodger at the station house and communicated to this office through our detective force, seems to be to pretend that the late Major Bagatelle is still living, and to take charge of funds for his ransom from captivity among the Indians. I am directed by the Superintendent to inform you of these facts. A special officer will come up by the next train to arrest Barber.

I am, sir,

Very respectfully,

Your ob't. ser't.,

PETER HAWLEY, *Chief Clerk.*

John, see that the scoundrel is secured.

JOHN. He has secured himself, sir; that wine put him sound asleep.

BILLINGTON, (*apart to Dora.*) And now, dear heart, it will not be necessary for us to go to Mexico. We will remain here, will we not?

DORA. Ah, yes.

JOHN, (*apart to Mary.*) I need'nt be jealous of James Barber now, Mary?

MARY. I think not.

DORA. And tell me, dearest, did you receive and read that letter this morning before you came to see me?

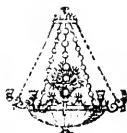
BILLINGTON. I do confess it.

DORA. And you knew Barber's story was false?

BILLINGTON. I fear I did.

DORA. Well, you have forgiven me, I suppose I must reciprocate. Nay, more, I will ask you to walk in to breakfast.

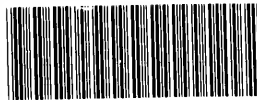
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